

THE INFLUENCE OF LATINO/A GENDER ROLES AND CULTURE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

JOSMEL PEREZ: The Influence of Latino/a Gender Roles and Culture on Student Achievement and Resistance
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Latino's comprise the largest minority group in the United States. They also possess the largest high school dropout rates, with Latino males possessing greater attrition rates than their female Latina counter parts. This achievement disparity between male and female Latinos is part of what lends relevance to this review. The review examines how gender and cultural pressures affect Latinas'/os' high school experience and different resistance reactions. It attempts to illustrate how both variables intersect to have an effect on academic achievement. Some trends that emerged in the literature were that criminalization and low expectations seemed to have an impact on academic achievement. In addition, different gender expectations from family, peers and school also affected academic achievement. Understanding the differences between the male and female Latino experience in schools and their different resistance reactions will help to create gender specific strategies to aid in their classroom achievement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	GENDER ROLES IN LATINO CULTURE AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACHIEVEMENT	5
	Latina Gender Roles & Academic Impact.....	7
	Latino Gender Role & Impact.....	13
III.	DISCRIMINATION AND MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACHIEVEMENT.....	19
	Discrimination against Latinos.....	19
	Discrimination against Latinas.....	23
IV.	RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACHIEVEMENT.....	25
V.	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	31
VI.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMELIORATION.....	33
	REFERENCE.....	37

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I have chosen to do a literature review that will examine how gender and cultural pressures affect Latinos' and Latinas' high school experience and different resistance reactions. Many studies explore gender or racial differences exclusively and their individual respective relationships with academic achievement. This literature review attempts to illustrate how both variables intersect to have an effect on academic achievement in high school for Latino youth in currently available research.

Gender differences are important across all cultures in shaping each individual's experience. Studying the intersection between race and gender will ideally hone in on the identification of possible pitfalls and highlight positive aspects of gender identity in order to improve educational strategies for future generations. Personally witnessing the correlation between gender, race, and academic achievement through my own educational experience, and the observations made through my work as a Multicultural Programs Coordinator influenced my decision to do further research on the topic. As a Latino male, working in the office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), and as a board member for the Scholars Latino Initiative, I see first-hand the urgency of exploring the Latino student's high school experience and its correlation to the Latino experience in higher education.

The review is narrowed to include only high school students because of my informed experience with this population, because it is considered the gateway to higher education and education is considered the great equalizer. By hosting and organizing various programs I've been able to personally witness how the cultural pressures placed on each gender can affect high school achievement, and how, with the right support, students can overcome challenges and barriers and become successful.

Aside from my personal connection to the material, this research is also particularly relevant to the present day teaching landscape where, according to the Pew Hispanic Research Center (2009), one in five schoolchildren is Latino, and one in four newborns is Latino. The Latino population in the United States is the largest and youngest minority population. North Carolina specifically has the sixth fastest growing Latino population in the country and this is reflected in our schools (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Teachers will increasingly have Latino students in their classrooms, and if they are not adequately equipped to handle the different challenges that these students face, the achievement gap between Latino students in high school and the mainstream majority of white students will only continue to widen.

The current national dropout rate for Latino youths is 17.2 percent compared with 8.3 percent for all youths. This means that Latino youth are nearly twice as likely to drop out as black youths who have a 9.3 percentage dropout rate. Latino youths are also significantly more likely to drop out than their White and Asian peers who have dropout rates of 5.7 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Understanding the impact of the intersection of Latino culture, race and gender roles will help to understand students' experiences in the educational system. There is a further divide in educational achievement between Latinas and Latinos where "Latinas have the highest dropout rate at 26% [and] only Latinos experience a

higher rate of attrition at 31%” (Pew Hispanic Center). When discussing these numbers, however, it is important to note that Latinas have increased their academic achievement throughout the last twenty years. This achievement disparity between male and female Latinos is part of what lends relevance to this review. Understanding the differences between the male and female Latino experience in schools will help to create gender specific strategies to aid in their classroom achievement. In addition to the urgency of understanding the Latino culture in order to better serve our growing number of Latino/a students, we must also understand the complexities within the culture, such as gender roles, and what impact these cultural complexities might have on student achievement. In doing so, we may be able to identify areas where we can improve our schools and ameliorate some of the problems that confront our Latino/a students due to culture or gender.

CHAPTER 2

Gender Roles in Latino Culture and their Impact on Achievement

When researching or discussing the Latina/o educational experience, one should explore the topic of gender roles as an influential variable. Due to the traditional and religious nature of Latino culture, the roles of men and women are often distinctly defined. Adolescent Latinas/os in high school often must juggle between their traditional cultural expectations and mainstream North American expectations. Many times expectations from home and school can be juxtaposed, leaving students in a position where they have to choose between family and school. In addition, gender specific prejudices can demoralize students from pursuing the goal of higher education, or remaining engaged in their secondary education. It is important to understand the Latino cultural expectations of each gender in order to better serve this population within our school systems.

There are still many gaps in research regarding Latino students in the United States. Among these is the lack of research on Latino students in the Southeastern region of the nation. Most research is concentrated on the Western or the Northeastern coasts where there are large groups of established Latino populations. In addition, there is a lack of research that has been conducted differentiating genders. Many studies simply combine data for both male and female students and do not analyze the variables impacted by gender. As a result, it was hard to find disaggregate information relating to Latino males. These gaps in research provide opportunities to conduct ground-breaking work in North Carolina, which is urgently needed.

The Latino population in North Carolina continues to grow at an advanced rate and our classrooms reflect that growth, particularly at the elementary school level. As we continue to study Latinos we also have to keep in mind that gender is only one of the many variables that has an effect on Latino academic achievement. There exist the additional dimensions of foreign-born versus native-born students, documented versus undocumented students, and native English speakers versus English language learners. Although perceptions about Latinos are very different, most Latino youth are not in fact immigrants. Sixty-six percent of Latino youth were born in the United States, many of whom are descendants of the ongoing wave of Latino immigrants who began coming to this country around the mid 1960s (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Adding even more dimension to this fact is that the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that a majority, or 58 percent, of foreign-born youths lack legal status (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Lacking legal status can be a great hindrance towards academic motivation for students because they may not be aware of avenues available for them to attend college. They may feel that there is less value in studying because there is no possibility for an academic future leading to a college degree for them. Making sure teachers are informed about important legislation that may change these opportunities for undocumented students, such as the D.R.E.A.M. Act, is necessary. Furthermore educators must be aware of the special opportunities that some private colleges and universities provide for worthy students lacking legal status, which can help teachers keep students engaged and invested in their academic progress. If we are to move forward as a state and nation to fulfill our commitment to educate our children, then we must understand how to reach all of our children, including our immigrant population, to promote their educational success. Educational disparities lead to other greater societal issues, such as continuing cycles of poverty and health disparities.

Latina Gender Roles & Academic Impact

One of the major keys to understanding Latino students is in understanding male and female gender roles in their cultural context. Some researchers, such as Julio Cammarota and Rachel Simmons consider that culture and gender roles must be understood simultaneously in order to comprehend the individual student experience (2004, 2002). As Nancy Lopez states “race and gender are socially constructed processes that are overlapping, intertwined, and inseparable” (Lopez, 2002). The most propagated terms used to discuss Latina/o gender identity are *machismo* and *marianismo*. Understanding gender roles in Latino culture begins with defining and understanding the concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo* (Clawson, 2006). These two concepts can help to explain how men and women in Latino culture interact and relate with one another at home, school, and the community.

Marianismo is the traditional definition of a woman’s role which stems from the veneration of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary is seen as the ideal woman, and one that all women should emulate. She is “the mother, the nurturer, she has endured pain and sorrow, and she is willing to serve” (Hurtado, 1998). Therefore, the ideal Latin American woman “is gentle, kind, loving, patient, and long-suffering” (Clawson, 2006). In addition, according to the values of *marianismo*, a woman is subordinate to the men in her life, and in some ways women are made to feel like they are “worth less” than men (Hurtado, 1998).

Even though they are expected to be submissive and viewed as socially inferior to men, women are at the same time, however, considered to be “morally superior to men [and the] preservers of the family and the strength of society,” and without them, civilization would undoubtedly fail (Clawson, 2006). To be considered a “good woman” a girl must remain a

“virgin until marriage and... invest devotion, loyalty, and nurturance in the family” (Hurtado, 1998). Some believe these attributes to be biologically based. In a study performed by Marysol Asencio, adolescent respondents believed that because women “got pregnant and gave birth, they were more inclined to be nurturing, monogamous, less sexually motivated, less violent, and in need of male protection” (Asencio, 1999). Therefore to be a girl that does not exhibit these traits is considered somehow unnatural and would bring shame not only on herself, but on her family, and those that are associated with her, including her friends (Asencio, 1999).

Although *marianismo* is one of the more prevalent terms used when discussing Latina gender identity, there are alternatives that exist. One of the alternatives to *marianismo* is *malinchismo*. *Malinchismo* derives from the historic figure of La Malinche [Malintzín], who was the translator for Hernán Cortés, during his conquest of South America and who thus supposedly facilitated the destruction of the Aztec empire (Hurtado, 1998). La Malinche is considered the ultimate traitor of Mexico, and in the traditional arena she is considered to represent all of the “bad” qualities of women. She betrayed her people, she maintained an out of wedlock relationship with Hernán Cortés, and then when he was “done” with her, she was given to one of his soldiers with whom she had children. Although traditional culture rejects her, Chicana feminists have adopted her as a sort of symbol. Instead of seeing her as the traitor, she is represented as a victim of gender oppression. In many ways La Malinche represents the dichotomy of how Latinas are represented in Latino culture. Women are divided in to two categories the “good” virtuous women and the “bad” traitorous ones (Hurtado, 1998).

Marianismo and *malinchismo* are two of the terms or views that define Latina female gender identity in a historical and cultural context and provide contrast to male gender identity. It is important to note, however, that girls do not define themselves only in relation to boys “one

can become a woman in relationship to other women” (Alarcon, 1990; Bettie, 2000). In other words, the definition of a woman in many ways is a social construction that young girls base not only on their interactions with men, but also with their interactions with other women. Girls base what it means to be a woman in relation to their mothers, aunts, prominent women in their community and women they interact with outside their own culture, such as teachers. Female teachers may come from different cultures, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds and may have a great influence on young Latinas’ perceptions of themselves.

Young Latinas in high school are greatly influenced by the dichotomy of female roles as they learn to define themselves socially. Parents often socialize their daughters along the traditional gender lines of “good women” and “bad women”. Good girls place their families above all else, which means that their own aspirations and goals can take a back seat. Being too career and academically ambitious can be cast in a negative light, as being “unfeminine” or “selfish”. They are expected to be non-aggressive and honor the authority of men, and the rules for their behavior can be very restrictive (Simmons, 2002).

As a result sometimes Latinas feel pressure to “behave right” while at school in order to uphold their reputation (Asencio, 1999). They also have the additional pressure of dealing with the North American culture and trying to fit in and assimilate into their new surroundings. Latinas in high school essentially “live in two worlds: the one more traditional and sheltered, and the other a contrary world of youthful license and temptation” (Simmons, 2002). Young Latinas sometimes feel so confined because of the traditional rules of their families, according to Valenzuela, that they “find that schools become liberating places where girls can exercise more fully their quest for individuality and independence” (Valenzuela, 1999). Adapting to the more permissive North American culture can sometimes cause Latinas in high school to be rejected by

their Latino peers. A Latina can easily go from being considered a “good girl” to being labeled a “bad girl” , for dressing differently, being too social with males, or participating in activities that are traditionally viewed as masculine (Valenzuela, 1999).

In “Machos and Sluts” Ascencio describes how a young lady who is drunk is seen not as a victim, but instead as “asking for it” when several males approach her to sexually take advantage of her. The young lady is frequently blamed for not having more restraint in her consumption of alcohol, even by her fellow females, and both groups assert that "she got herself in that jam". The students in the study also expressed how they feel that this was just an example of her showing her true nature, and therefore since she “clearly” had no respect for herself, then she was not worthy of the respect of her peers and deserved whatever bad things may happen to her. In North American culture, she would have been seen as a victim by her female peers and in need of protection. For Latinas, this girl needed to be shunned because association with her would lead people to believe that they too were “sluts.” As stated by one of the female students, “You gotta be careful, if you hang out with a girl they're talking about you're going to get it, too, so you stop being tight with her, and that’s the way it is. You don't want to take the fall, regardless if they right or wrong” (Ascencio, 1999). Girls also face similar issues to their male counterparts in terms of defining exactly what it means to be a “woman.” There is the stereotypical cultural definition, but even that is not standard.

The nurturing aspect of the traditional female role presents itself in the school setting through the help that young Latina women will often give their boyfriends, as observed by Valenzuela. The young women in the high school that Valenzuela observed “seem oblivious to the imbalances in the favors they give to (as opposed to receive from) their male friends.” They would help them do their homework, sometimes at the expense of their own. One girl, Norma,

readily admitted that helping her boyfriend had an effect on her own grades, but justified it by saying that if she did not help him, then he would more than likely give up and drop out of school. The various girls that Valenzuela interviewed did not seem to view their support “either as a chore or as the fulfillment of sexist expectations.” According to Valenzuela “the construction of female identity in traditional terms invariably translates into compromises women—and in this case girls—make to secure the love and affection of a male.” She describes how “men often respond to such women with personal attention and gifts. Like Norma, whose own achievement suffers as a result, women caught up in a culture of romance scale back their own aspirations to achieve heterosexual love and attention” (Valenzuela, 1999). The effect of this culture of romance is that it may be one of the contributing factors to the high dropout rates found in Latinas. Young Latinas sacrifice their academic achievement for the sake of perceived “romantic” achievement, believing that having a boyfriend and being in love is of more importance than high academic achievement (Valenzuela, 1999).

As young Latinas adjust to what is expected from them in their own culture, and what is expected of them in North American culture, variations of Latina female gender identity appear. Some examples of these are described in the study by Ascencio where she described the appearance of a third category to describe females, “human.” Whereas in traditional Latina/o culture, girls are typically cast into two lots “good” and “bad”, she found that in Latina/o youth there was a new prevalence to add the category of “human.” In other words, a single transgression from the traditional role of female as detailed in the description of *marianismo*, does not cast out a girl as “bad.” A girl is allowed a reasonable margin for “mistakes,” because after all she’s only “human.” By the students’ own testimonies, however, a girl must still be careful for too many “mistakes” can still lead a girl to be thought of as “bad.” One male student

spoke about his girlfriend, “You know, my parents think of women like if they do it once, they are a whore. If I told my parents my girlfriend had a guy before me, my mother would say, ‘I hope this is not serious 'cause she's been around.’ They wouldn't understand that maybe she made a mistake. Shit, she's just human. I mean, if she had a lot more guys I would agree with them, but for just one guy...” (Ascencio, 1999). This is a clear illustration of how Latinos in the United States, as they adapt to the new culture, will also adapt some of the traditional gender roles expanding the traditional dichotomy of female gender roles to a trichotomy of good versus human versus bad.

Latinas are also confronted with this dualism in the mixed messages they receive at home, where family will motivate them to be self reliant, but at the same time put family, and becoming “*mujeres de hogar*,” above everything else (Camarota, 2004). In school, where the White middle class value system is considered the norm, individuals are celebrated, whereas in Latino culture families are household-centered rather than child-centered (Villenas, 1999). These conflicting messages can have adverse effects on the educational outcomes of Latinas. Confronted with choosing between their family’s needs and their own educational and career needs, young girls having been taught that family should come first will often sacrifice their futures for the sake of their family’s present (Villenas, 1999).

Latino Gender Role & Impact

Masculine identity is central to the social identity of young men in Latin American culture. The concept of machismo is the widely accepted and traditional expression of Latino masculinity (Ramirez, 2002; Clawson, 2006). According to Clawson the ideal “macho” is one who:

“seemingly [has] control over every facet of their lives and of the persons and events that shape them...[they are the] epitome of self-confidence...[a] fearless gambler and risk taker...an extrovert, a hard drinking braggart. A macho is the supreme master, both at home and at work...his authority and judgment cannot be questioned by his wife, his children, or his underlings...[he] is always seeking fame in the eyes of others. Lives his life en la calle [in the streets]. Compromise with his opponents is hard to achieve because it implies weakness on his part” (2006).

One can see examples of how the media has capitalized on this image of the Latino male gender identity through commercials like the ones for the alcoholic beverage Dos Equis XX. They use an exaggerated expression of the machista ideal and declare him “the most interesting man in the world.” In further accordance to this “machista” ideal, it is generally thought and agreed upon that men do not speak about their feelings, pleasures, or fears (Ramirez, 2002). Clawson further states that “the excellent man, the admired man, is not necessarily a ‘good’ man in some abstract moral sense. Rather, he is good at being a man” (Clawson, 2006). Clawson is referring to the stereotypical definition of Latino masculinity, which describes a man as morally bankrupt, but in control of every aspect of his life.

There are academics, such as Rafael Ramirez and Marysol Ascencio, who warn against this oversimplification of Latino male gender identity. There are many ways to be a “man” within Latino culture, even if these ways do not necessarily correlate with the more widely propagated vision of masculinity (Ramirez, 2002). Rafael Ramirez states in his writings that male identity is a product of social interaction, therefore individuals exhibit different forms of masculine identity (Ramirez, 2002). He argues that gender is relative, and is influenced by such things as race, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation or preference, and culture (Ramirez, 2002). He states that many of the “images of Latino masculinity (machismo), in particular those that focus on the negative aspects of this construct, were derived from earlier limited works of the 1950s and 1960s, which were influenced by ethnocentric analyses” (Ramirez, 2002).

Rolando Andrade states that “Machismo in much of the scholarly and popular literature is a term used in a simplistic, catch-all manner. It has been used as a vogue term to cover half thought-out ideas rather than the careful, systematic analysis of conditions that overlap on real social problems” (Ascencio, 1999).

There are also some positive aspects of machismo that are often left un-discussed, or simply deemphasized in literature about the subject. Traits like courage, honor, responsibility and loyalty are often left out of the gamut of qualities of the “perfect prototype” of machismo. Traditional Latino values for men emphasize a sense of obligation towards their family to provide and to protect. In addition to all of this, Ramirez states that the real “distinguishing feature of masculinity lies in the principles of power” (Ramirez, 1999). What he means by “the principles of power” is that in Latin America, many of the positions of power are held by men, and that being the gender in power has a great influence on gender identity.

Young Latinos in high school may have the traditions of their families, but in many ways masculinity is defined individually through social interaction (Ramirez, 2002). In the U.S., a young Latino male’s own perception of his masculinity is influenced by some of the external expectations of what it means to be a man as determined by his peers, parental and school expectations. In Latin America, Latino males are both the gender and race in power. Although males are the gender in power in the U.S., Latinos are not the race or ethnicity in power. This leaves Latino males to contend with a “deficit of power”, where culturally they are expected to be in control of every aspect of their lives, but functionally they are a marginalized segment of society.

As a result machismo has increasingly become a common way to explain gender identity. Young Latinos, sometimes in the absence of positive role models to counter these expectations,

seek to fulfill misinformed conjectures of what it means to be a man. The negative aspect of the narrative of what it means to be a man according to machismo, “a risk taker, an extrovert, and a hard drinking braggart,” becomes their own expectation of themselves (Clawson, 2006). This is supported by a study done by Ascencio which she relates in her article “Machos and Sluts”.

There she stated that “young people in this study frequently used the term [machismo] to explain the source of many of the negative Latino male adolescents’ behaviors, including violence and sexual aggression” (Ascencio, 1999). She relates how young Latino men and women associate masculinity with violence, aggression, and sexual prowess. They frequently cited the origins of these behaviors to be biologically based and that men were more naturally inclined to be that way. They approach what in mainstream North American culture may be viewed as deviant behavior, as what is necessary to become a man. The students also argued that environmental factors influenced how a boy eventually developed into a man. For example staying at home too much, doing house work and being too domesticated threatened their manhood and could even lead them to homosexual tendencies. This is expressed by the student Bernardo who stated, “I know this guy. His mother raised him just like his sister. He wasn't allowed to hang and he had to go home and, like, clean the house and everything. He became a faggot. That's what happens when you do things like that” (Ascencio, 1999). This leads to another gender issue within Latin American culture, which is homophobia. Homosexuality in general is not well accepted within the Latino community, which places additional cultural pressure on homosexual Latinos. Homosexual men are seen as rejecting their manhood and wanting to be a woman. This relegates them to the social status of women, and as Ascencio stated, worthy of the same treatment as “sluts” (Ascencio, 1999). This rejection of homosexuality in Latino culture in the United States may be a result of the concept of “power” as explained by Ramirez (Ramirez,

1999). In fact “many researches suggest that [Latinos]...may perpetuate troublesome heteronormative gender and sexual relations that emphasize—and exaggerate—male domination and heterosexuality as a way to ward off stereotypes of black and Latino inferiority...” (McGuffey, 2008). This means that the negative reaction to homosexuality may be attributed to the lack of Latino power within North American society.

What these attitudes towards masculinity illustrate is that the social definition of a man has a great impact on male behavior. This is then translated into classroom behavior, if a man must be a braggart, independent, and a risk taker and women should be subordinate to him, then acting out in school is supportive of this perceived male ideal. The sense of independence that is fostered by this ideal would also impede young Latino males from asking for help with their academic work, especially from a woman, as it would be considered shameful to ask for it or seek it (Mangan, 2011). This may be one of the contributing factors to the higher dropout rate found in Latino males.

In addition to the sense of independence, there is also a sense of obligation to protect and provide for their family that is fostered in young Latino men (Asencio, 1999). This sense of obligation can also contribute to the high drop out rates seen in the Latino male population. In fact, 74 percent of all sixteen to twenty- five year olds that participated in a recent Pew Hispanic Center survey that dropped out of school stated that they did so because they had to help support their families (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

Sofia Villenas and Donna Deyhle describes a young man who felt that receiving a high school diploma would not guarantee him a better job and so he decided that “instead of being in school I should be working and helping out my parents.” The reward for his sacrifice was being treated like an adult by his parents and siblings (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). In a study performed

by Valdes she found that the mothers she interviewed saw success as a mother as teaching a young male how to be responsible. She explained that school failure sometimes had more to do with the issue of cultural clash or differences with schools “expecting a blueprint of a prototypical family based on mainstream middle-class White Americans.” In other words, the high dropout rate for male Latinos may be impacted by the difference of values between the school and the Latino family.

There is also the influence of criminalization of young Latino males by teachers, counselors, and school administrators where they perceive young Latino males as deviants based on their native language, physical appearance, culture, and even how they dress. Criminalization contributes to their gender identity since men are perceived to be essentially “morally bankrupt,” and it is expected that they will behave outside of the positive parameters of society. This criminalization “reinforces a social construction of their masculinities that [re]frames their gender identities with racist ideologies of violence and deviance” (Camarota, 2004). This aspect negatively influences their educational experience as it puts them at a disadvantage when they are suspended, or skip school and thereby miss out on their own education.

CHAPTER 3

Discrimination and Microaggressions and their Impact on Achievement

Aside from gender roles and culture, gender specific discrimination in and out of school poses another major threat to Latino and Latina educational success. About four in ten young Latinos say that they or someone they know has been a target of racial or ethnic discrimination (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). A myriad of microaggressions also plague young Latinas/os in high school. Microaggressions are defined as “subtle insults (verbal nonverbal and/or visual) directed toward people of color often automatically or unconsciously”. As with discrimination, whether made by teachers, school officials, or community members these microaggressions “may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished morality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Discrimination against Latinos

Young males face criminalization from adults in the school system. Urban Latino youth are often represented as deviants prone to criminal behavior. Many teachers and counselors assume that simply because a young man is a Spanish speaker, he must be involved in gang activities (Camarota, 2004). Latino males tend to feel like the “school climate is hostile towards them, that the teachers do not expect as much from them, and that they are given less encouragement to do their best” (Malagon, 2010). This feeling is not surprising when in

overcrowded urban schools increased security is turning what “are supposed to be institutions of learning, into spaces in which urban Latino and Black youth, particularly young men, are humiliated and criminalized through searches and other demeaning encounters” (Lopez, 2002).

The way Latino males dress also affects how teachers and school administrators treat them. According to Valenzuela the U.S. born Latino ninth-graders in the school she studied were very preoccupied with looking and acting in ways that made them seem cool. She noted that males in particular tend to be more involved than females in countercultural styles, but many females share these same preoccupations (Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers and administrators (consciously and unconsciously) associate the “countercultural styles” (baggy pants, tattoos, piercings, etc.) as a signal of gang membership. In the school that Valenzuela studied, the majority of the students did not belong to gangs, but did choose to dress in the countercultural style. The style of dress brought on negative attention from teachers and school administrators, who assumed that young men dressed in this manner, were up to no good. Parents, on the other hand, believed that their children’s choice in dress was more aligned with their teenagers’ desire to “fit in” than their “proclivity for trouble or their membership in any particular gang” (Valenzuela, 1999). The assumptions of school officials create a negative environment for students where “even the appearance of gang membership often results in students receiving unwelcome attention from school authorities. A self-fulfilling prophecy develops when youth react negatively against school authorities who breathe heavily on them” (Valenzuela, 1999).

This is reinforced throughout society with “workers in retail stores, private security guards in companies, and everyday citizens contribut[ing] to monitoring and containing the potential ‘threat’ of young Latinos” (Camarrota, 2004). This is supported in a study conducted by Camarrota where male participants often talked about how they were policed, contained, and

treated as criminal threats in places like school and neighborhoods. In fact, “young [Latino] males are twice as likely as young [Latina] females to say that they have been questioned by police for any reason” (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Lopez also describes her observations in an overpopulated urban New York City high school where disciplinary actions were being disproportionately used against males, for things as simple as wearing a hat inside of the building. She also observed how the high school seemed to be feeding the students into the criminal justice system, when students were routinely arrested for skirmishes in school that involved no weapons and no serious injuries (Lopez, 2002). Pedro Noguera makes a similar observation where he notes that urban schools more and more take the appearance of prisons, where the primary objective becomes social order as opposed to any academic goal (Noguera, 2003). The real danger of this criminalization of young Latino males is that it “reinforces a social construction of their masculinities that [re]frames their gender identities with racist ideologies of violence and deviance” (Cammarota, 2004). In other words, behaving criminally becomes a part of their expectations for themselves.

In addition to criminalization, there are lowered expectations for academic achievement. Teacher expectations are relevant because “school performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to...interpretations and responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own success or failure (Ogbu, 1987). This means that lowered expectations from a teacher will elicit a reaction from the student, which may be negative and may result in a negative outcome for the student. Each student reacts individually, therefore lowered expectations does not guarantee a negative reaction from a student, but it makes it more likely. Cammarota related one student’s example of lowered expectations where the student described how on his first day in an honors math class, his teacher stopped him upon entering the room

questioning whether he was in the wrong class. Upon verifying his enrollment in the course, she went on to remind him that her class was “very hard,” and there was a lot of work to be done in it. This was not motivating for the student because he felt unwanted in the class. As the only minority in his honors course, being questioned in that manner made him feel even more out of place (Cammarota, 2004). Many Latinos face similar pressures. As they are made to feel they are unwanted in the academic setting they struggle to find places that they can fit in, which may in turn also push them to make decisions that are detrimental to their academic future.

Young Latino men are the victims of many other microaggressions, one teacher in the high school that Lopez observed “inadvertently framed Latino young men as potential drug and crime statistics” (Lopez, 2002). In a class discussion about the problems that exist in contemporary society students identified “crime, drugs, and pollution”. The teacher went on to ask whether crime was directly or indirectly caused by poverty. One of the male students spoke up stating that poverty did not necessarily lead to crime, rather he pointed out that 60 percent of “weedheads” are in fact in the suburbs, not the inner city. He received a vociferous positive response from the other students in the class, the majority of which came from low socio-economic backgrounds. The teacher reprimanded them for being loud and went on to state that, “In an indirect way poverty can lead to drugs” (Lopez, 2002). Students then felt understandably dejected about this negative comment about their own community. The teacher was well intentioned, and was teaching course material, but was not sensitive to his student population.

Discrimination against Latinas

Latinas in the studies conducted by Cammarota (2004) often spoke of unfair treatment as well, which had the potential of discouraging them from pursuing an education. Girls complained about not being taken seriously, about teachers that allegedly “didn’t give a crap if

you were going to graduate or not [and] didn't make an effort to teach you anything" (Cammarota, 2004). They also face lowered expectations from teachers with some feeling like "it's a waste of time" to teach them since "they will be pregnant soon anyway" (Lopez, 2002). In fact one student described a teacher that made a point to single her out and tell her that "he would take no excuses about doing work...don't get pregnant" (Lopez, 2002). One of the issues is a difference in point of view "whereas teachers demand caring about school in the absence of relation, students view caring, or reciprocal relations, as the basis for all learning. Their precondition to caring about school is that they be engaged in a caring relationship with an adult in school" (Valenzuela, 1999). It is a cycle where students are disengaged because they feel that teachers do not care, and teachers are negligent because they feel like "it's a waste of time".

One of the researchers, Pamela Quiroz (2001) was a witness to this negligence when she observed some of the teachers routinely missing a large part of their scheduled classes leaving students unattended. She found one of these teachers having breakfast at the cafeteria during one of her regularly scheduled class times and she repeatedly found others conducting business, such as real estate, during their class times as well. All of the testimonies describing deliberate negligence, poor and unfair treatment, and low expectations give voice to some of the reasons that Latinas feel such pressure to drop out of school (Cammarota, 2004).

Latinas also face some of the same challenges that Latinos do. The way they dress is also a point of contention. Bettie talked of how Latina girls in lower achievement classes dressed more provocatively and wore heavier and darker makeup than did their honors course white peers (2002). Just as boys are judged for their countercultural dress, so are girls. There were assumptions by teachers and peers about the moral nature of these girls that wore heavier and darker makeup that were in most of Bettie's observed cases not true (Bettie, 2002). Valenzuela

also noted the impact that dressing differently had on perceptions of students, mostly in reference to males, but also in reference to females (Valenzuela, 1999).

The negative impact of discrimination is far reaching and works in conjunction with all of the other challenges that young Latinas/os face to make graduating from high school, or even more ambitiously, college, seem like a farfetched dream.

CHAPTER 4

Resistance and Resilience and their Impact on Achievement

Latinas/os in high school face tremendous pressure such as dealing with their families' expectations, discrimination, and lowered expectations of teachers and school officials, all of which will push them to react in different ways. There are several ways that resistance and resilience manifest themselves within Latino high school students both male and female. As these different types of resistance and reliance are defined, bear in mind that "manifestation [of] resistance and resilience may differ among females and males" (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001). First we will define different types of resistance, and then we will discuss how they are exhibited in Latina/o high school students with specific examples by gender. Discussing resistance essentially "emphasizes that individuals are not simply acted on by structures...they demonstrate how individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions" (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001).

The most commonly researched and traditional notion of school resistance is self-defeating resistance. Students who partake in self-defeating resistance have a "strong critique of their oppressive social conditions but ultimately help re-create these conditions through their own self-defeating-resistant behavior" (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001). In other words, students partaking in self-defeating resistance may recognize injustice and may want to act against it, but the method by which they choose to do so leads them to do damage to their own academic

future. Actions such as dropping out and/or skipping school, may be considered self-defeating resistance. There is evidence of self-defeating resistance among young Latinas in reaction to some of the apathy and neglect that they experience in high school. They react by neglecting their studies and/or dropping out of school. They feel unwanted and unappreciated in the school landscape and therefore remove themselves from it.

Self-defeating resistance from Latino males in high school sometimes stems from the criminalization they face, which pushes them into developing an “oppositional relationship” with the educational system (Malagon, 2010). The most common response to discrimination was the self-defeating resistance act of cutting class (Lopez, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado, 2001). Teachers and staff’s treatment of students as criminal threats, along with the challenges of gender and culture differences, among others, can negatively impact a student’s educational experience, thereby promoting their drive to cut and in a self-defeating manner resist school (Cammarota, 2004; Solórzano & Delgado, 2001). In a study performed by Cammarota, males described skipping school as something that they “did together with friends, an activity that symbolized their friendship” and “allowed them to evade the surveillance of school staff” (Cammarota, 2004). They described it as not something they necessarily enjoyed, but instead saw it as a “somewhat troublesome activity undertaken for the purpose of forming and sustaining friendships—a time together for positive social interaction, but at a cost” (Cammarota, 2004). In addition to skipping school, getting suspended may also be seen as an act of self-defeating resistance, when students feel that “the rewards of education—namely, acquisition of knowledge and skills and ultimately, admission to college, and access to good paying jobs—are not available to them, students have little incentive to comply with school rules” (Noguera, 2003). Young Latino men also face the lowered expectations that Latinas do and also have similar

reactions. In addition to being interpreted as self-defeating, however, they can also be considered just conforming to their expectations if they do so without recognizing any kind of social injustice and simply choose to give up, not as a criticism of the system but as a tacit acknowledgment of their own deficiencies, real or imagined.

Another type of resistance is conformist resistance, which according to Cammarota is when students simultaneously accept and reject cultural norms at home or school (2004). Students are “motivated by a need for social justice yet hold no critique for the systems of oppression” (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001). They choose to strive for social justice within “the existing social systems and social conventions” (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001). This mode of resistance focuses on using education to “counter societal inequalities without challenging systemic oppressions of schooling” (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001). An example of conformist resistance would be a student who decided to volunteer with a tutoring and counseling program for dropouts so that they can adapt to the ways of school, without challenging the ways in which the school systemically may be failing the students that are dropping out.

Although as stereotypically “submissive under-achievers” some young Latinas may be led to drop out of high school, some young Latinas may choose a different path. They will use their success in school to resist some of the societal and cultural constructions that seek to make them viewed as inferior to males (Cammarota, 2004; Bettie, 2002). Some Latinas take an orientation to school where they see school achievements as an avenue to a higher status that “challenges male domination and offers greater autonomy” (Cammarota, 2004). In other words there is a trend of “resistance through achievement”, or what is known as conformist resistance. School is one of the only venues where young Latinas are able to outperform their male counterparts without breaking from their traditional gender roles. By becoming academically

successful they are able to find a positive way to break away from the oppressive cycle of gender inequality. Also contributing to their achievement could be that the “social pressure for girls to conform and follow rules, as part of the definition of femininity, could facilitate their doing better in school than working-class boys, for whom manhood includes more pressure to engage in risk-taking behaviors and resistance to control” (Bettie, 2002). Although this may be part of the reason that Latinas are still behind other ethnic groups, they have been steadily increasing their high school graduation rates over the last twenty years and are exceeding their male counterparts (Cammarota, 2004).

Transformational resistance is yet another way that students may react to oppressive circumstances at school. Transformational resistance is characterized by being “both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (Delgado & Solórzano, 2001). It is sometimes manifested in students as a feeling to “prove them [those who oppress them] wrong” (Cammarota, 2004). Of all forms of resistance, it is the most likely to result in real social change, and unlike conformist resistance, it does not “serve to strengthen the oppression and domination of the person. Tara Yosso extended transformational resistance to include resilient resistance, which is the intersection between conformist and transformational resistance. Resilient resistance is where the strategies students use “leave the structures of domination intact, yet help the students survive and/or succeed” (Yosso, 2000). Succeeding in school may also be interpreted as transformational resistance if the student, for example, desires to attain a higher education and become a doctor, teacher etc, in order to give back to her community. On the surface it may seem like she is simply meeting societal and parental expectations, but she is in fact making a critique of the social structure of her school and intending to find a way to change it which then meets the criteria for transformational resistance. They may also adopt the “prove

them wrong” attitude, where they recognize that school officials, and even peers may have lowered expectations for them, but they will prove that they are capable of more than those low expectations (Cammarota, 2004).

Finally, there is a conception of resilience that is considered to be a “multifaceted, complex phenomenon that enables an individual to succeed despite adverse conditions or outcomes” (Wayman, 2002). Educational Resilience is a subcategory of the more general study of resilience and is defined as “the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences” (Yosso, 2000). When researchers identify the factors that contribute to educational resilience, they separate them in to two categories: personal factors and environmental factors (Wayman, 2002).

Further research is needed on resistance behaviors of Latino males. The research currently available concentrates on these negative aspects of resistance for males, and in cases where other types of resistance are discussed, they are not discussed by gender, but instead only in reference to race. As a result of this lack of research, this literature review is only able to discuss self-defeating resistance of Latino males at this point. There is more readily available research on the resistance behaviors of Latinas, but it is focused on Chicanas, the West coast, and the Northeast. Further research that is gender and region specific is needed.

CHAPTER 5

Summary of Findings

Currently available research conducted by Cammarota, Bettie, and others included in this literature review, on the influence of gender and culture on academic achievement is limited, but suggests that there is a strong relationship between the two variables. The traditional gender role of Latinas as described in *marianismo* is that of a gentle, nurturing and submissive woman (Clawson, 2006). Women are placed in an inferior position to men in the social hierarchy. This impacts the achievement of young Latina women because sometimes they must compromise their own academic goals in order to fulfill their family expectations. Young Latino males are influenced by the traditional description of male gender roles as well. *Machismo* is the most common term used in the description of the traditional Latino gender role. *Machismo* is characterized by extreme independence, a resistance to talking about feelings, emphasis on being a provider, and an unwillingness to ask for or seek help (Clawson, 2006). The Latino male gender role may influence academic achievement because young men sometimes feel forced to put their education on a back seat in order to help support their families. They also shy away from asking for help because they feel it would compromise their manhood.

Young Latinos and Latinas also face gender specific discrimination and microaggressions. Latinas are often faced with lowered expectations, with some teachers saying that the girls will “get pregnant anyway”, justifying that teachers should not give their best effort to aid their students (Lopez, 2002). This has a negative impact on the outlook on education of some Latina students. They related feelings of hopelessness in regards to their education, and this feeling led some students to drop out of high school (Lopez, 2002).

Young men are also faced with discrimination and microaggressions, which often takes the form of criminalization. Based on the way young men dress, and on their native language, many young Latinos are assumed to be in gangs by teachers, school administrators and staff. This criminalization has a negative impact on the education of young Latinos because they feel marginalized at school and sometimes choose to remove themselves from school in order to avoid dealing with feeling unwanted (Camarota, 2004; Solórzano & Delgado, 2001).

Due to the various challenges that young Latinos and Latinas face, they are pushed to resist in various manners. Self-defeating resistance is the most commonly studied, and is exemplified in both males and females. The most common example of self-defeating resistance is dropping out of school. There is also transformational resistance, which can be characterized by a “prove them wrong” attitude. The students who exemplify this type of resistance object both to the flaws in the system, and their expected role within it. Transformational resistance is the most likely to lead to real social change but seems to be the hardest to achieve.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Recommendations for Amelioration

In reading research about the intersection of race and gender in Latina/o high school students one realizes that although both young men and young women come from the same cultural and/or socioeconomic background and are attending the same high school, their cumulative experiences can be completely different thereby shaping what their academic success may be. The ignorance of educators and administrators about the culture of Latinos also contributes to an unwelcoming environment for Latino/a students where they feel marginalized. In such an environment many choose to react in a negative manner by partaking in self-defeating resistance. Research also points to the crisis that marginalizing the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States within our school systems creates. In fact, in 1999 when Villenas published her article she recognized that the state of education for Latino/a youth was in crisis. Today, thirteen years later, Latinos/as still significantly lag behind their White, African American, and Asian peers in school achievement. This leads to the questions, if we were already in crisis thirteen years ago, where does that leave us now? Is the relationship between the educational system and Latino/a students beyond repair?

Assuming that there is still hope, then as Lopez states “there are many changes, both institutional and pedagogical, that can be made in an effort to dismantle the race-

gender gap in education” (Lopez, 2002). Institutional changes involve making sure that Latino males are not routinely criminalized by school guards, making school a welcoming and accepting place. Teachers should be more aware of how they handle disciplinary problems, be conscious to be equitable among males and females, and among all ethnicities. Teachers and administrator should also be more mindful of cultural and value differences that may impact academic performance. Including such things as discussions about race, class, and gender inequality within the school curriculum could help students “counteract power relations between Latino students and the dominant society” by having open discussions about the topics, instead of students bearing resentment about inequities (Lopez, 2002). Including these topics in the curriculum would also serve to help students feel legitimized in the classroom, and make them participants in their own education. Coop programs that would allow students to work while earning high school credit towards graduation might also be an effective way to keep students engaged in their high school education without having them sacrifice the help they may wish to provide their families.

We must bear in mind that we have only addressed the intersection of two variables in this literature review-ethnicity and gender. Although very significant to the educational outcomes of young Latinos/as, there are many more variables that also need to be urgently addressed. Among them are the issues comparing native born versus foreign born students and documented versus undocumented or mixed immigration status families, and how these variables affect students in their academic achievement. Discussing country of origin leads to topics such as cultural tracking. Both genders face institutional culture discrimination through what Valenzuela calls cultural tracking. In

high schools in the United States, students are placed on to tracks where some are in honors or college bound courses and others are placed on average or vocational track. Immigrant students are placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes where there is very little likelihood of a transition from ESL classes to the honors courses track. Socially, this tracking impacts immigrant youth because “separation encourages and legitimates... a status hierarchy that relegates immigrant youth to the bottom” (Valenzuela, 1999). Creating honors ESL classes would help to remediate some of this cultural tracking. Also encouraging students to participate in courses that are more universal, such as math and science, might lead to higher academic achievement and encourage higher self-esteem.

Further research on Latino/a students in the Southeastern United States is also needed. The Latino population in the Southeast is newer to the region, and there is not much research studying the population in this area. Further studies may help support that discrimination and microaggressions vary by region. Knowledge of regional differences would help teachers and administrators be more conscientious and prepared for region specific needs.

There is also the matter of the absence of Latina/o teachers in schools. At 84 percent, the majority of the teachers in public schools are White. This number is down from 1986, when 91 percent of teachers were White (Feistritz, 2011). A growing number of Latinos/as are entering the educational field, which could be beneficial to Latino/a students (Feistritz, 2011). Having teachers of their own race could help students to identify with school, have positive role models, and feel like their cultures are

legitimized by the school system. It is important to note, however, that a teacher does not have to be of the same race in order to validate a student's culture within the classroom.

This literature review attempted to shed light on a very important current educational issue. It is a first attempt at a more in depth understanding of the current educational crisis facing Latino/a students. Several valuable points have been raised, and the need for further research has been established.

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